

## FINAL DAYS – WEDGWOOD AT SHUGBOROUGH

The last work on the monuments in Thomas Anson's lifetime was the completion of the Lanthorn of Demosthenes, originally planned in 1764. The structure was built before 1767, when Joseph Banks saw it, but it was left unfinished. The original monument had been capped by a tripod, and Stuart had drawn his reconstruction of what this might have looked like.

By December 1770 Josiah Wedgwood had become a close friend of James "Athenian" Stuart, carrying on the inspiration of Greek design from him into his own work. It is reasonable to suggest that Thomas Anson, again, is the link between Stuart and Wedgwood, and to the later stages of the classical revival. Wedgwood's immense dinner service for Catherine the Great includes many views of the Shugborough landscape.

Wedgwood was discussing with Stuart the adaptation, or new building, of premises in the Adelphi on the south side of the Strand for a new showroom. Wedgwood wrote to his partner Bentley about this and about a visit to Matthew Boulton's Soho Works in Birmingham where they discussed whether it was a good thing or not for Wedgwood to have a showroom for his ware next to Boulton & Fothergill's showroom.

*"We agreed that those customers who were more fond of show & glitter than fine forms & the appearance of antiquity, wo'd buy Soho vases, and that all who could feel the effects of a fine outline & had any veneration for antiquity wo'd be with us."*

He continues:

*"I forgot to tell you that Mr Boulton was making an immense large Tripod for Mr Anson to finish the top of Demosthenes Lanthorn, building there from Mr Stewart's design. The Legs were cast & weighed about 5 cwt, but the workmen staggered at the bowl & did not know which way to set about it; a Council of the workmen was call'd & every method of performing this wonderful work canvassed over. They concluded by shaking their heads & ended where they begun. I then could hold no longer, but told them very gravely they were all wrong, they had totally mistaken their Talents and their metals; such great works should not be attempted in Copper or in Brass. They must call in some able Potter to their assistance and the work might be completed. Would you think it? They took me at my word & and I have got a fine job upon my hands in consequence of a little harmless boasting. Mr Stewart said he knew Mr Anson wo'd glory in having the Arts of Soho and Etruria united in his Tripod, & that it wo'd be a feather in our Caps which that good gentleman would delight in taking every opportunity to shew for our advantage. So this matter stands at present but Mr Boulton, Dr Darwin and I are to dine with Mr Anson on New-Year's Day & shall talk the matter over again."* (6)

The New Year's meeting did not take place, but Dr Darwin was invited to Shugborough with "Wedgwood, Boulton, Keir and Bentley, if he is the country" in January 1771. Wedgwood was not able to attend this time due to trouble with his artificial leg.

The completion of the Lanthorn brings together Anson and Stuart with Wedgwood, who would take the Greek Revival inspiration into its next phase, Darwin, the revolutionary philosopher, and Boulton, the key figure in Industrial Revolution Birmingham. It's interesting to note that even Stuart still sees the promotional value of pleasing Thomas Anson, even at the age of 75.

“Keir” is James Keir (1735 – 1820), born in Edinburgh, but attracted the Midlands by the fame of Erasmus Darwin and the “Lunar Society.” He contributed improvements to Darwin’s poem “The Botanic Garden” in 1787. In 1791 Keir proposed a toast at a Birmingham dinner on 14th July 1791 in favour of the French revolutionaries and the fall of the Bastille and precipitated the “Church and King” riots in which conservative workers were incensed by radical masters.

A final link the chain comes in a letter from Wedgwood to Boulton on 3rd December 1772.

*'Mr Anson behaved with great politness to me & admired our things very much. He has given me leave to mold from any of his medals, or anything else he has. He ordered a pair of the best painted vases we have & I intend sending a pair of 93s we have here @ £10-10 unless you have any you think will do better. ....I left the patterns at Mr Ansons and was to have gone again after this week with a Moulder but I cannot go till after the 12th. At parting he very politely made me a present of a silver medal of the late Ld. Anson & said if he liv'd till summer he would come & spend a day with me at Etruria & his sisters will come with him, but his life is very precarious, I fear he will scarcely survive the winter.'*

Sadly Thomas died in early 1773 and never made the journey - but it is a very tidy end to the story that Shugborough might have supplied designs for the next generation of Greek Revival art. (9)

Thomas died in London and was brought back to Colwich Church by a hearse with six horses. His funeral was simple. He was buried at St Michael’s Church, Colwich, in what Pennant calls “the burial place of the Ansons, made a l’antique, in form of a catacomb.”

The coffin inscription was simply:

'Thomas Anson  
died 30th march 1773'

In the Staffordshire Record Office there is a list of people who were to receive mourning rings to mark Thomas's death. The Bagot family still possesses one. They were decorated with pink enamel.

The list defines Thomas's particular friends and acquaintances in 1773.

The names include:

Philip , 2nd Earl of Hardwicke and Jemima, his wife;  
the Dean of Lincoln (James Yorke, younger brother of Lady Anson);  
Lord Harcourt (a founding member of the Dilettante Society and another patron, presumably at Thomas's encouragement, of Stuart);  
Mr Mytton (who must be John Mytton, a Dilettanti Society member since 1764 and now the head of the Mytton family - Thomas's old friend James Mytton, who died in 1764, was his uncle and, for a while, guardian);  
Mr (Thomas) Pennant (John Mytton's cousin);  
Sir Piercy Brett (who had supplied the design for the Chinese House);  
Admiral Keppell;

Mr Adair (mentioned in letters from Anson's Italian agent John Dick);  
Mr Stuart, (the architect);  
Mr Cambridge (Richard Owen Cambridge, satirist and host of house parties in Twickenham, an old friend of Admiral Anson and a close friend of Thomas's musical friend James Harris);  
Sir Thomas Parker (another cousin and old friend of Lord Hardwicke);  
Lord and Lady Macclesfield;  
Mr Orme (The East India Company historian and friend of Stuart and Anson);  
Mr Kammel.

Thomas's will left the estate to his sister (and his nephew, George Adams), allowing them to move any furniture they liked to Oakedge Hill, their house (with landscaping by William Emes) on the slopes of Cannock Chase) with annuities to his other surviving sisters. He also left money to a small but fascinating group of friends.

There were £100 (£10,000 today) annuities to James Athenian Stuart and Mr Stillingfleet, £50 (£5,000 today) annuities to Mr Kammel and to a Mr Kent and £500 (£50,000) to Mr Orme, in token of his long friendship. (Apart from staff the only other named beneficiary was Sir William Bagot who was left Thomas's medal collection, and then had a fairly acrimonious dispute with George Adams/Anson about whether this really meant all of them.)

Mr Stillingfleet is mentioned in many of Stuart's letters. He can only be Benjamin Stillingfleet, botanist and musician (he translated Tartini's textbook on harmony.) Stillingfleet was the original 'bluestocking' as he wore blue rather than black at formal gatherings. Thomas seems to have had an interest in botany. His very brief diary of his Egyptian voyage includes details of how to preserve seeds and bulbs on the voyage. Stillingfleet was also active in agricultural reform. There are many references to him in Stuart's letters to Thomas.

Stillingfleet actually died before Thomas, in December 1771.

Mr Kent is Nathaniel Kent (1737-1810), agriculturalist.

He was Thomas Anson's estate manager in Norfolk. The Ansons had bought property from the Coke family in 1750 - long before the family married into the family of Coke of Norfolk. Kent had been a diplomat, and studied farming in the Netherlands. Thomas encouraged him to become an agricultural adviser. According to the DNB he soon after this met Benjamin Stillingfleet and shared ideas of farming.

Kent published 'Hints for Gentlemen of Landed Property' in 1775 which inspired the modern farming methods of Coke of Norfolk, and Shugborough in 1805. Kent praises Mr Anson for his enlightened attitudes to his tenants in this book.:

*"...no tenants have a better landlord, nor any landlord a better set of tenants."*(16)

Coke is credited with introducing modern crop rotation but it was Kent was introduced the idea into England.

Later Kent managed the royal estates at Windsor and Richmond and he was awarded a goblet by Thomas Coke in 1808 for his services to agriculture. Thomas Anson, Viscount Anson, married

Thomas Coke's daughter and built the model farm at Shugborough in 1805, but the marriage and the farm owe their origins to Thomas Anson's support of Nathaniel Kent.

Kent called Thomas Anson:

*'the true friend of merit and the encourager of science wherever he found it'. (12)*

Robert Orme (1728 -1801) is also mentioned several times in Stuart's letters. He had lived in India but returned to England in 1760. He became historian of the East India Company. He was also a close friend of Nollekens who sculpted bust of him, and also of Sir William Jones, son of mathematician William Jones, who was the leading authority on Indian culture and wrote fine translations of Indian literature.

Elizabeth Harris wrote, on 6th April 1773:

*'Mr Anson's death is a loss to many, the poor he was charitable to to a degree, the artists of all sorts had his protection and partook of his generosity, and all his friends were sharers of his most elegant entertainments. His great fortune comes to Mr Adams his nephew. Both he and Mrs Adams are amiable people and deserve it'. (15)*

It seems likely that his nephew continued plans that Thomas had already decided, developing the farm and removing the more eccentric aspects of the landscape – though Thomas himself may not have approved of moving the old village. He had built new cottages there for the local people.

The rediscovery of Greek architecture and philosophy, the new discovery of nature and new discoveries in science and industry led to a time of revolutionary change.

Nowhere else is such a key to the spirit of the age as Shugborough and no-one sits more closely to the centre of this web of new thought than Thomas Anson.

- (1) Ingrid Roscoe: James “Athenian” Stuart and the Scheemakers Family, APOLLO Vol. CXXVI September, pp178-184, 1999
- (2) Kerry Bristol: The Society of Dilettanti, James “Athenian” Stuart and the Anson family, APOLLO vol. 152 9461) pp 46-54, 2000
- (3) David Watkin: Athenian Stuart, George Allen & Unwin, 1982
- (4) <http://wedgwoodmuseum.org.uk/canal.htm>
- (5) 1767 anonymous poem in Staffordshire Records Office.
- (6) John Martin Robinson: Shugborough, National Trust, 1989
- (7) Eliza Meteyard: Life of Josiah Wedgwood, London, Hurst & Blackett, 1865
- (7) <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=40557><http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=40557>
- (9) Mss. letter in the Wedgwood Museum
- (10) J Mordaunt Crook: The Greek Revival, John Murray, 1995
- (11) Grove Dictionary of Music
- (12) <http://www.bahs.org.uk/30n1a1.pdf>. An Eighteenth-Century Land Agent (British Agricultural History Society)

- (13) Mikhaila Freemanova and Eva Mikanova: 'My honourable Lord and Fathe'..18th-century English musical life through Bohemian eyes, Early Music, May 2003
- (14) Rosemary Dunhill and Donald Burrows: Music and Theatre in Handel's World: The papers of James Harris 1732-1780, OUP 2002
- (15) Hampshire Record Office  
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